

Babbage, 1847), the laryngoscope (Manual Garcia, 1854) and “the simplest and one of the most important innovations”, the stethoscope, first described in 1816. Ernest Board’s picture of Laennec Listening to the Chest of a Patient shows the physician using a simple wooden tube to auscultate the chest of a man showing probable phthisis and a detail is also used on the dust cover of the book.

A number of plates are devoted to hospitals and teaching. Reproductions of the famous picture showing Jean-Martin Charcot conducting a case presentation at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, by Pierre-André Brouillet (1960s) must hang in many neurological units (we had one at Claremont Street Hospital) and the student audience includes figures such as Babinski and Gilles de la Tourette. A similar picture by American artist Irving R. Wiles shows an unnamed doctor teaching on a sick child at the New York Polyclinic School of Medicine (1891). The audience includes three women, which provokes a lively account of the advent of women into medicine in the late 19th century. Hospital wards of the time are depicted vividly by Vincent van Gogh (The Hospital at Arles, 1889), a ward in the London Hospital painted by Belfast born John Lavery, 1915 and Ancoats Hospital Outpatients’ Hall by LS Lowry (1952) who’s characteristic little figures vividly convey the crowded bustle of the old-fashioned outpatient hall.

The subject of insanity is the stimulus for several paintings, from the individual Healing of a Lunatic Boy (1986), by Stephen Conroy to a vivid depiction of The Madhouse (1987), painted by the Russian artist Sergei Chepik, following a number of visits to a psychiatric institution where, as ‘artist in residence’, he made sketches of the inmates and produced a picture which is part representational and part allegorical. The painting was banned in Russia but exhibited at the Salon d’Automne in Paris, where it won a gold medal. Non-Western medicine is well represented in An Ayurvedic Practitioner Taking the Pulse (Delhi c1830), by an unknown artist, a Medical Painting from Central Tibet (1800-1899), A Mandarin Doctor Consulting a Patient by Zhou Pei Qun (19th Century), A Medicine Man Curing a Patient (Sioux Indian c 1850) and An African Healer Throwing Bones by Meg Campbell, painted for the cover of the Lancet Supplement 2000 entitled ‘One World, Many Voices’.

This is a beautifully produced and well researched book, full of clinical interest and historical fact. The pictures and text together convey a wealth of relationships between doctors and patients over the centuries and provide a pictorial commentary on social customs and cultures in many parts of the world. Alan Emery has had a distinguished career in neuromuscular genetics and was a pioneer in the classification and epidemiology of muscular dystrophy. His artistic skills are well known and this book evolved from a series of articles about art and medicine written for Clinical Medicine, the journal of the Royal College of Physicians, who are joint publishers of the book with the Royal Society of Medicine. Dr Emery is too modest to include any of his own work (or perhaps he felt painting medical subjects was too much like work), but he does include a moving picture by another medical artist, Sir Roy Calne, entitled ‘The Compassion of the Intensive Care Sister’ (1989). Marcia Emery has a background in psychology and has worked as a librarian in various academic institutions. They make a strong team and one can imagine their joy on a visit to the Museu Picasso in

Barcelona in discovering a wonderful painting by the young artist, aged 16, showing a doctor at the bedside of a sick woman which predates the artists cubist style.

In addition to the 53 plates there is a list of over 100 pictures in galleries all over the world depicting specific medical conditions and the introduction lists books and articles which approach the subject of medicine and art from a number of other perspectives and tempt one to further reading. Medicine and Art would make a good present – it sits elegantly on my coffee table beside a sister volume entitled Music in Art by Tom Phillips (Prestel, Munich & NY 1997). When will we see the completion of the triad – Medicine and Music?

MICHAEL SWALLOW

Clinical Hypertension in Practice. Gregory YH Lip. The RSM Press Limited. Published January 2003. ISBN 1-85315-485-7. £14.95. www.rsmppress.co.uk

This book is one of a series published by the Royal Society of Medicine Press designed to provide clear cut opinion-leader advice and summary facts relevant to the diagnosis and management of patients with Hypertension. In this regard, Clinical Hypertension in practice authored by Gregory Lip succeeds admirably. Professor Lip provides a succinct, up-to-date and authoritative overview of the management of Hypertension that is relevant to every day clinical practice. The text is well written with the appropriate use of bullet points, tables and graphs that illustrate data from pivotal trials of major interest. The use of boxes at the end of sub-sections in chapters that summarise and emphasise points of particular interest to the practicing physician is a useful addition to the text.

This book would be useful for undergraduate medical students and junior hospital doctors in addition to nurses specialising in cardiovascular medicine. It would also be valuable for busy general practitioners in providing an update on the guidelines for treatment of hypertension, a practical guide to the clinical assessment of hypertensive patients and evidence-based advice on non-pharmacological and pharmacological interventions to treat the condition. I enjoyed reading this book and would recommend it highly to practitioners who treat patients with Hypertension.

G McVEIGH

Medical Statistics Made Clear: An Introduction To Basic Concepts. Ashis Banerjee. The Royal Society of Medicine Press Limited. www.rsmppress.co.uk ISBN: 1-853155446. £19.95. Published January 2003.

The author argues that a failure to understand statistical concepts is a barrier to using peer reviewed literature. This book aims to increase our understanding of statistics, and subsequently make the medical literature more accessible.

Unfortunately, this laudable aim is not met.

The book is hampered by its layout. Following a brief introduction (where the aims are stated) you are led to a five page glossary of terrifying statistical terms. The author’s incredible knowledge of statistics is then summarised in ten chapters of bullet-pointed lists, but it is hard to see how a

reader's understanding could be advanced. The absence of illustrated examples is a huge oversight, as this would allow the reader to make the connection between statistical concepts and published literature.

The book is partially redeemed by its clear index and excellent bibliography of statistical "classics".

I would argue that it is knowledge of clinical epidemiology, not statistics, which makes medical literature accessible. If you are trying to improve your understanding of published medical literature, a book on statistics will probably not help. Instead, consult any of the widely available evidence based medicine handbooks or articles from the BMJ or JAMA. These will have enough detail to prevent an unquestioning faith in everything you read in a medical journal.

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Systematic Reviews to Support Evidence-based Medicine:

Khalid Khan, Regina Kurtz, Jos Kleiffien and Gerd Antes.
The Royal Society of Medicine Press Limited.
www.rsmppress.co.uk. Published 2003.

Reviews of medical literature are extremely useful to practising doctors, as they often contain large amounts of relevant information in a small space. An unfortunate premise of this book is that an expert's (non-systematic) review of his or her area of expertise is somehow unreliable or dangerous. As evidence based theory becomes widely accepted such mistrust is largely misplaced. Nonetheless, there is a place for structured, systematic reviews of medical literature to answer important clinical questions. This book is a helpful summary of how to judge someone else's review and how to conduct your own.

The authors, who are clearly enthusiastic about systematic reviews, take the uninitiated through the systematic review process in a step-by-step manner. The book is concise and illustrates the main points from published studies. They also cite important references, many of which are available for free from websites, or can be accessed electronically from local medical libraries.

Overall, the book is not easy to read, but it is intended as a how-to-do-it manual rather than information to remember and recall. A great weakness of evidence-based texts is their focus on therapeutic interventions, and the lack of detail on reviewing studies of diagnostic tests, prognosis or aetiology. The authors admit this weakness, and try to balance things out with an illustrated example on reviewing literature on diagnostic tests.

If you wish to critically appraise systematic reviews there are other books and journal articles to consult, but this text is a reasonable starting point. It may be useful to anyone embarking on an MD project, as a thesis introduction ought to be a systematic review of available knowledge prior to your own piece of research.

Naturally, the authors encourage readers to undertake their own systematic reviews, and recommend joining the Cochrane Collaboration. However, this book is a suitable template should you wish to go it alone.

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